

keeping it together



You may have been asked to be the Master of Ceremonies (MC) at a friend or family member's wedding, or maybe you're considering hiring a professional MC at your own wedding.

So, what does an MC do?

BY DAVID HENTON

The main role of the Master (or Mistress?) of Ceremonies is to co-ordinate the ceremonial part of the wedding celebrations – namely the speeches and cutting of the cake – and to do whatever else is necessary to make the reception run smoothly. This usually entails liaising with the venue's staff about catering and serving requirements (ie which tables eat when), calling the guests together for speeches, introducing the key players and calmly handling any little dramas that may come up (eg lost and wailing children; Grandad's teeth in the fountain – you know how it is!).

Photos by Angela Scott

For those who've been asked to be an MC, and to reassure the bridal couple, let me set the scene and take you through a typical scenario.

The wedding has been held earlier and guests are now arriving at the reception. They will mix and mingle, catch up with old friends, and meet new family, before enjoying the wedding feast, speeches and ensuing fun.

You, as the MC, will be already at the reception to meet and greet the guests, making sure they have refreshments, and explaining which table they'll be sitting at for the meal and where to put presents and cards etc. Eventually, the bride and groom arrive to rapturous applause and more personal congratulations.

The venue's catering manager catches your eye and gives you a pre-arranged signal that tells you they are all set, and the food is ready to serve.

You stand somewhere very obvious (say, beside the top table where the bridal party will sit), give a fairly sturdy wine glass several sharp taps with a fork to get everyone's attention, and announce in a booming voice (being an MC is not for the timidly spoken):

'Hello, everybody. I'm your MC for today, as I think most of you know. Right now we're about to start the meal, so if you could please take your seats. And, for those who haven't already found them, the toilets are out the door and to the right...'

Once everyone is seated, you can tap the glass again, get up and announce the order of events.

'We'll be having entrées, followed by the main course. And after that, we can all sit back and enjoy the wedding speeches. These will be followed by a leisurely dessert, some relaxation, music and dancing... and a bit later on we'll adjourn to the foyer to read out some messages and formally cut the cake.'

You get the idea. The meal then gets into full swing...

fast forward to the end of the main course

By now, everyone is feeling replete and relaxed, having caught up on each other's news, views, illnesses and children. There's the general contented burble of conversation and laughter, and now it's time for the speeches.

As MC, your main role now is to warm up the audience and briefly introduce each speaker. Above all else, you call for and lead the applause as each nervous speaker gets up to start their speech.

Another important tip – rather than just announce the beginning of the speeches, it's a good idea to say:

'Ladies and gentlemen, the wedding speeches are about to begin... so please make sure you're sitting where you can see, your glasses are full for all the toasts... and we'll begin in a couple of minutes.'

Now, allow a good 10 minutes for toilet visits, preparation of cameras, and moving of furniture etc. Once everyone is fairly settled – you're on!

ting ting ting...

'Good evening, ladies and gentlemen (or good evening, everyone)... welcome to the formal (or slightly less informal) part of the evening – the speeches!

For those I haven't had a chance to meet and say hello to, my name is David and it's my honour to be your Master of Ceremonies for the evening. We have some wonderful speeches and talented speakers just itching to get up and entertain us (big grin to the nervous father of the bride)... so let's get straight into it.

'Our first speaker is Brian, the very proud father of the bride.



Your main role now
is to warm up
the audience.

I've known Brian for over 30 years. As many of you know, he's a passionate fisherman and some of his unlikely stories about "the one that got away" are legendary! However, today Brian has a different topic. He'll be giving us a few fond, parental glimpses into Chrissy's early years and no doubt some first impressions of Eric!

'So ladies and gentlemen (or everyone) – would you please all put your hands together for Brian!' Lead the applause with gusto and the audience will follow with Brian standing to a great ovation – an introduction well done.

cont:-



in a nutshell:

- ✘ Get to know each speaker so you can introduce them with a few sincere, well-chosen words
- ✘ Give the audience plenty of warning when the speeches are about to begin
- ✘ Be brief, positive and enthusiastic – how you feel about the speaker is how the audience will feel
- ✘ Remember to call for the applause, having done each introduction
- ✘ Lead the applause yourself. This is important – the audience will happily follow
- ✘ Thank each speaker, and segue smoothly to the next speaker
- ✘ Be ready and willing to help organise other aspects of the wedding and reception
- ✘ Be prepared for anything that might happen – it will!
- ✘ And finally, enjoy yourself. You'll be great!

Photo by Angela Scott

At the conclusion of Brian's speech, you stand up again to join the applause.

'Thanks, Brian. A wonderful speech. Didn't I say he was good?'

You then move smoothly into the next introduction...

'You've heard things from a parent's point-of-view, so now let's hear from the happy couple themselves.

'Our next speaker is our lovely Bride, Chrissy. I've watched Chrissy grow up through all those stages Brian has just talked about... from a feisty four-year-old through to a stropky teenager, to become the delightful young woman we all know today. Knowing Chrissy, I'm sure she is about to respond to Brian's speech and tell you what really happened! So let's give a big warm welcome to...Chrissy!!'

Again, you lead the applause with enthusiasm.

You thank each speaker after they finish their speech and gently provide the link from one speaker to the next. Each introduction should only be one or two sentences, or enough to give guests a feel for the person. Avoid the temptation to go into lengthy and detailed anecdotes (remember – it's not the MC show).

Also, be careful not to steal the speaker's thunder. I once heard an MC give such a full and lengthy introduction to a guest speaker, that at the end of it, the man himself said, 'Well, there's now no need for me to speak – I'm afraid he's said it all!' Sadly, he meant it, and sat down!

logical order of speakers

Although there's no correct format for the order of speeches, it's worth remembering that many guests will know only one of the couple well. So, I favour a logical order as follows:

Father of the Bride – the traditional host of the wedding, the FoB will formally welcome everyone and then talk mostly about his daughter growing up, with a few words about when the groom arrived on the scene.

Each introduction should only be one or two sentences

Father of the Groom – sometimes speaks and provides an insight into the groom's early years.

The audience now has a feel for the bridal couple from a parental and family viewpoint. Now the couple can respond. Traditionally the groom only speaks, but happily nowadays the bride usually says a few words:

Bride – responds to her father's speech, thanks the parents, the bridesmaids, and tells of meeting and falling in love with the groom.

Groom – responds to the father's speech (thanks the bridesmaids if the bride doesn't speak), and tells of meeting the bride, proposing etc.

Now it's time for a view from outside the family. Enter, the bestman:

Bestman – tells of friendship and adventures with the groom (what he's really like), speaks of his qualities and gives a friend's perspective on the couple coming together in marriage.

By this stage the audience will feel they know the bridal pair really well, from all viewpoints. If each speech is a concise five minutes, and they all speak, that's a total of 30 minutes, which is plenty.

Avoid too many additional speakers. I've heard of a wedding where the speeches lasted three hours – not a good idea! Also, think carefully about opening the floor to anyone who wishes to speak. A wine too many and something inappropriate could be blurted out.

After the speeches, the evening gets under way; desserts are served and the principal speakers can finally relax. Later in the night, you can call guests into the foyer (say), to stand around the cake, take a few final photographs, listen to a few key messages being read out, and witness the cake cutting.

Now you can finally switch off and savour a job well done! ♥